

**State Board of Education
Transformation Discussion with Vermont Educators
November 20, 2007**

Educators broke into three groups to respond to three questions, facilitated by Department staff.

1. As you envision a transformed learning environment for the students of Vermont what current practices should be included in a transformed education system that would best serve the needs of all students?

- Colchester High School—collaborative work groups/professional learning communities. Staff meets in departments or across departments for short “cycles of inquiry.” One example is student writing. The group poses questions, collects data to answer that question, and then adjusts instructional practice as a result of what was learned (i.e. determined that sophomores were excelling at analysis but that freshman needed more practice with summary skills, across the curriculum). This was then shared with the entire school community. Has been very successful in Colchester and led to effective changes. Value was in embedded professional development and analyzing student work together. Meetings are scheduled in place of faculty meetings. Challenge is finding time for these meetings.
- Harwood High School—community service learning. This gives students the opportunity to learn in different ways (conducive to differentiated instruction) because students can contribute to projects in different ways...builds students’ self-esteem. Harwood offers students multiple pathways to success. One of the key components of service learning is student choice. Students need to be engaged and feel ownership over the project if it is to be meaningful.
- Burr and Burton—exploring the professional learning community model. Wants to move away from the model of bringing in external folks to run professional development. Wants to also develop a richer community service requirement (currently 50 hours). Moved to requiring service learning projects with freshman and sophomore class. Students are involved with community members and take on specific projects. Example: working with therapy dogs; across the curriculum are contributing to the project. Staff volunteers extra time for the project. Hope is that the projects will continue and that students will develop a commitment to making their community a better place. Burr and Burton puts on a community service learning fair for students to give them a sense of the options available to them.
- Montpelier High School—academic integrity has to be key in any service learning program. Student investment and engagement is crucial. Question becomes, “How do we mentor young people to become involved citizens who can contribute in a meaningful way in their communities?”
- Williston had two progressive, non-traditional programs (Alpha and Swift House). Excited to see that the transformation document reflects her positive experience with those programs. A bit scary because educators give up control. “Kids are more demanding of themselves than as adults we could ever ask them to be.” Students choose projects and dictate learning. One of the values of project-based learning is that students see the process from beginning to end. Pockets of places across the state where this type of learning is already occurring. Key component of this model is that students really understand themselves. If they are to drive their own learning, they need unbiased feedback about their learning so that their work is guided by their

strengths and weaknesses. Educators need tools to be able to give students that feedback about their learning. If this vision is to be ‘scaled up’ we need to better support schools (with tools) to help them facilitate this type of learning. System must support the model. Students are not let loose without any understanding of what they are doing...a lot of work goes into preparing them before being let loose so that their work is meaningful. Infrastructure is key.

- Sounds as if scaffolding is really important to this model of learning.
- Spaulding High School/Barre Technical Education—importance of technical education and true hands-on learning. School has worked to integrate academic and technical education. Teachers express that they do not want to lose the opportunity for students to learn a trade or a skill...goal is to integrate academic components into that training. But training opportunities should not be lost. Another goal is to bring elements of the technical education model into the academic realm (i.e. more hands-on learning). Idea is that students will be more engaged if the learning is hands-on. One example of integrating technical components into academic classes is bringing students in a geometry class to the tech center to see the theories they’re learning in the classroom applied in the ‘real world’ to things like building design.
- Class size is important. Making learning truly student-centered is challenging when classes are large. To provide personal scaffolding and facilitate individualized learning, class sizes need to be small. This type of individualized learning requires a lot of one-on-one work between student and teacher. Discussion of current structure of school: What challenges does it pose to this vision of truly individualizing education for students? Forcing students to move from subject to subject in a schizophrenic way stands in opposition to individualized, student-driven, project-based learning. Perhaps we should do away with classes. What barriers does the typical school schedule and structure pose to transformed education?
- Burr and Burton—“Target” program for high-risk students. Reports that it is very successful and graduation rate is very high. In the program, students participate in regular classes but also participate in other learning opportunities outside the traditional school structure (i.e. the group raised a barn, hands-on learning). [Question of stigma—are students in the Target program stigmatized? Answer: No. Integrity is an important component of the Burr and Burton culture and this helps reduce the stigmatization of programs like Target.]
- Burr and Burton—Mountain Campus project. Students and educators go to mountain campus for a semester; hike in to the woods every day. They will build a cabin and engage in other collaborative, interdisciplinary projects (math, science, social studies, commitment to sustainable practices, respect for the environment). Project is new and experimental and resistance emerges around concerns about Carnegie units and students attaining certain credits (which might not be possible if students participate in the program). Professional Development in Rivendell is very good. Twelve full days of professional development PLUS Early release days in winter on Thursdays—3 hours of professional development every week for 6 weeks. Good for teachers.
- Math/English/Science Networks work really well—they get positive feedback. Network leaders are teachers in the classroom. Ongoing conversations among teachers has been very valuable.
- Responsive classroom model has impacted student learning and very valuable. Parents are very positive about the responsive classroom model. Bring community together.

- Hard to know what practices will fit in with Transformation document. Concern that vital results don't get lost in individual learning plans. Don't want parents and kids to say school requirements are not important to individual plans.
- Small class size is important. Vermont is unique in keeping that and should stay. Small class size would be necessary for individual learning plans.
- As a small state, we have a good teacher adviser system. TA systems are vital for students and fundamentally important to help motivate students. Teachers need guidance in schools where the TA system is just being implemented. It is also a learning experience for the Teachers. Takes a while to get going. Community has a different perception of TA system. A universal TA system in the state would be good. Inservice for TA. What works in one school may be helpful to other schools. U-32 & Rivendell have very strong TA systems. Brings kids together that might know each other and they support each other—creates strong bonds. TA is a consistent person in students' lives. Rivendell uses 3-way conference—advisor, student & parents. These 3-way conference days need to be kept. Student brings in work; shares their learning with parents and advisor.
- Local content/literacy Leaders within the school system to work with teachers instead of going outside consultants. These teachers need the time to do this—small group of core teachers—teacher leadership within district. Money for positions, time, be able to continue to teach and also provide professional development to other teachers in their district.
- Essential skills; GEs defining what kids should do at a particular level
- Backward design; rethinking how teachers are approaching their instruction
- Statewide test is aligned with standards; input from teachers, released tasks, drives good instruction (compared to other states)
- DRA reading assessment targets appropriate skills for 2nd grade; emphasis on early literacy; professional development teachers get is critical
- NAEP scores show that K-12 literacy is strong; VT has a cohesive K-12 plan
- Movement toward integration strong at elementary level, gets less so as the grade levels progress
- Network meetings a good structure for professional development: technology and GEs and state assessment. Teams of teachers work together (doesn't happen at schools very often). Hard for all the teachers who want to go and cannot because of missing class time and sub conflicts
- Mentoring programs for new teachers (Washington West has a mentoring system; specific two-year protocol; also Rutland area—South?); not always even across schools; expect an influx of many new teachers over the next years. Difficult in a small school. – can cost a lot of money some years and others not; hard to find good mentors.
- Network meetings not effective (one-shot deal) – better PD which changes teaching is working with literacy leader / curriculum leaders in school
- Networks more effective if groups of teachers go together and then meet after
- Turnover of administration is a problem; not a lot of longevity among principals.
- UVM is discussing not outreaching with graduate courses; SE VT left out of UVM, teachers go to UMASS instead
- PLC was great! Best professional development; dropped after a couple of years
- Biggest challenge is varying levels of what kids bring (or not) to school: increased gap between those kids who get support at home and those that don't; challenge for

teachers when kids have such a range of experience; concern for preparation for global economy

- U-32 students come back for years after to visit their Teacher Advisor
- Problem: students use computers to write all the time but state assessment requires them to write by hand; perhaps low scores are a result of handwriting. The way you teach and the way you assess should be aligned.
- Again, lack of technology is a challenge
- Grade Expectations and statewide assessments that drive effective instruction
- Teacher Advisory groups in schools
- Mentorship of new teachers
- Professional Learning Communities + teacher networks
- Problems:
 - Lack of consistent level of technology
 - Turnover of administration, esp. principals
 - Widening gap between student who receive support at home and those who don't
 - Students assessed using methods that do not mirror instructional methods (longhand vs. computers)

2. As you envision a transformed learning environment for the students of Vermont what new practices should be included?

- There is a distinction between content and learning. Educators need to give up their control of their content.
- It is very difficult to 'give up content' and focus on students' individual needs and interests when class sizes are large.
- How do we deliver educational tools to kids? Some kids are disengaged and disempowered by the traditional learning process—we need to determine a way to meet those students' needs. Strategy is to engage them by tailoring learning to their interests.
- Discussion of cost effectiveness: how do we make this affordable? One particular program was cost effective (same cost as traditional academic model) because students are only in the traditional setting a few hours a day...in those other hours, they are in the community or working at a job. Thus, the community helps share the cost and responsibility of educating students. Goal of education is to help students become "active members of society." This model meets this goal.
- Multiple pathways for student learning based on student interest while setting high expectations for student performance.
- Question posed about how individualized learning and non-traditional structures might work for more diverse populations...many schools in Vermont are very homogeneous. How well will this work for all students in the state? Responses:
 - When multiple pathways are provided, it is traditionally the high-income students who participate in college-track, academic programs and lower-incomes students who participate in technical programs. Important to remove all tracking for true multiple pathways to succeed for all kids. Students' interests and choices must dictate learning, not student demographics.
 - There are some students for whom the traditional structure work. They will excel in any format. However, when the learning process is more flexible and project-based (often as a result of needing to meet the needs of students who are not well served by the traditional system), those students who do well 'inside the box'

become strong leaders. The high flyers do soar in these non-traditional programs. So parents of high flyers, while anxious initially, end up seeing the benefits of the program. This type of learning model can be successful for students across the spectrum. It opens up more possibilities for high flyers.

- Even those who do well in school are not being effectively served by the current model. A more dynamic, flexible learning environment will really benefit all students, even those already successful ‘inside the box.’
- Challenging to implement this new type of learning in current model. Educators are constrained by ‘the box.’ The box includes the ways teachers are paid, the number of students in a classroom, students in certain subjects for a certain amount of time.
- Dream of new type of learning model—teachers working together with a small group of students on project-based learning, multi-disciplinary learning, together for longer blocks of time.
- Students for whom the current model works might not be supportive of leaping ‘outside the box.’ Acknowledgement of the fear associated with moving away from the current model (from successful students and parents of those students). Educators involved in the discussion today are willing and excited to move outside the box but it is important to remember that not everyone feels that way. There is often a lot of resistance. Teachers can become very conservative when talking about change.
- Things to do away with in the current model: Carnegie units.
- One strategy that helps guide the creation of new projects is to ‘backwards design’ the curriculum—what do we want our graduates to know and be able to do? Start with clarifying student expectations and then build programs from that set of expectations. Educators/departments are questioned about how they can get students to that goal? Important that these conversations are school-wide and not just department-specific.
- Teachers would probably be agreeable to adding more days local school based professional development. Early release days take time with students for teachers in Warren. Schedule in Rivendell is built around the early release. They have a longer school year.
- Professional development days that go across districts. Teachers would like to hear best practices in other districts and get PD with other teachers not just teachers within their schools. PD days that bring teachers together from several districts work really well. Is done in some areas now. Teachers could pick what they wanted to go to. Right now when something works, there is not a lot of opportunity to share it with other districts.
- Success or best practices need to be shared. Teachers should be able to define what they need for PD.
- Sometimes what works in one school is ingrained in that school but doesn’t mean it will work in another.
- Higher Education programs are not teaching student teachers what they need. For example, colleges were not teaching math rubrics when portfolios were on top priority in Vermont education.
- Data drives the action plan; action plan drives professional development. Teachers need to develop action plan.
- Montpelier takes one day and discusses action plan and initiatives. In some school, data is given to core teachers and each group develops their own piece of the action plans.

- Some action plans come from the supervisory union. Big variety within districts on how action plans are developed. In some schools, the culture is that teachers do not have any power, but in some schools, the teachers are empowered. Empowerment depends on how involved teachers want to get—being involved in committees empowers teachers.
- 360 degree review—teachers are not just by administrators, but other teachers, parents, themselves.
- Chittenden South piloted 360 degree review.
- Possible new practices could be put in teacher contracts—they would be empowered that way.
- Relicensure and professional development need to be seamlessly aligned
- Need for more consistent technology infrastructure
- Real support for new teachers: collaboration, team approach
- Individual Learning Plan for all students; teacher mentorship/relationship for each child at all grade levels – might be more important at HS level
- “Digital divide” a problem in schools; teachers need tech support but also professional development in how to use technology to learn; let students learn in a rich environment; more choice for students
- Students need skills to skim and scan and deal with the AMOUNT of information; do teachers know how to instruct these skills? Teachers are overwhelmed with their own lack of knowledge and fear. Need course work/training for teachers to learn how to use the technology effectively.
- Strong library-media specialist in every school who can help teachers learn to embed technology in their learning
- Students who HAVE technology at home experience a gap between what they learn at school and on their own time
- Service learning but meaningful service learning (not a one shot but sustainable)
- Build in environmental awareness
- Differentiation for individual needs: ability to experience the world of work, online or outside the walls of the school (Professional Development)
- Be less focused on a grade level; developmentally appropriate levels instead. Get rid of artificial designations
- Senior year in HS should not look like 11th, 10th, 4th, 2nd...
- Create expectation that all students can take college-level courses for higher level learning.
- We know what children need – can we get to the kids when they are born to circumvent emotional and behavioral problems? Homes are not intact. How can we make a difference in the homes at an early age? Preschool starting earlier; intervention with parents.
- Critical thinking block! Habits of mind needed
- Moodle is an example of how easy technology can be (again, PD); need to overcome fear
- Online Professional Learning Community
- Teacher education: emphasis on integration not a narrowly defined curriculum
- Make choice a priority
- One way to get teachers excited is when you see what they can do (How can I do that?) Perhaps teachers can be exposed to models of schools which have been

transformed so they can see what it can look like. (RC – demonstrate that it can really be done and let it evolve)

- There are effective practices throughout the state (FAP); need to figure out how to implement them more widely
- Multiple pathways for struggling students (we are losing kids at 5th grades);
- Redefine senior year
- Establish strong relationship between PLP and alternative pathways
- Strong teacher advisory program
- Environmental awareness in curriculum
- Differentiation for individual needs
- Be less focused on a grade level; get rid of artificial designations
- Preschool starting earlier; intervention with parents.
- Wider implementation of effective practices (FAP) throughout the state

3. What questions does the document, *A Step toward the Transformation of Education in Vermont*, raise for you as an educator? A principal?

- Concern that a “common vision” might be construed as ‘sameness.’ Sameness can kill innovation in a school. Each school should have its own vision in light of its community. Should not be a ‘one size fits all’ model.
- Title of document reflects a care and concern for kids...not just intellectual interest in student performance. Very heartening.
- Appreciates the focus on individualized learning plan. Conceptually, it is a brilliant plan. The challenge is that it is very labor intensive. It takes a lot of effort and time to ensure that you’re meeting students’ range of needs—academic, social/emotional, engagement, etc. while, at the same time, making sure that students are being pushed and challenged. Time is a current constraint on this type of work. It takes a lot of time to coordinate individualized learning for students. To develop a clear, concise plan for students, educators need time. Many non-traditional programs are peripheral to the core academic model. Challenge is connecting positive elements of that periphery (student-centered, student-driven, engaging for kids, hands-on, flexible, project-based, real-world experiences) to the core. There are elements in the traditional core where students can engage with one another and with members of the community in a meaningful way...teachers become facilitators and not the sole owners of knowledge. Current process is to work to bring elements of peripheral programs into the core.
- Examples of strategies or programs that work are often in the peripheral—it’s not typically in the core. So should the core change? How do you bring elements from the periphery to the core, the box? As it stands now, students who participate in traditional, peripheral programs often have to make sacrifices. Post-secondary education requires students to stay ‘in the box’ (AP credits, certain course loads, etc.) Important to recognize the ‘boxiness’ of society and the rest of the education community. How to blend the two and ensure that students do not have to make sacrifices.
- Post-secondary world needs to change and acknowledge students who experience education other than the traditional ‘box’ structure. Important to recognize that college admissions process might not yet gel with the vision we have for our students in Vermont. Post-secondary institutions need to be active in this conversation. Think

- about standards-based transcripts. One school with non-traditional programs has added course descriptions to transcripts so colleges would understand the transcript.
- Challenge is that in order to pull this off, a lot of changes have to take place:
 - Students have to shift their expectations for what school is and what takes place in school.
 - Parents have to adjust their expectations.
 - Strong administration is needed to ‘walk the walk’ and support the school and educate the community to help them make it through the transition.
 - Educate the educators—give them examples of successful projects and programs so they see the benefit of the transition.
 - One thing that at least one principal has seen is that teachers really want what is best for students. If that means changing, it will be difficult but teachers will strive to do what’s best for kids. If there is a better way and you can take them there, they’re going. Will be difficult to completely get rid of the box but hope is that it will dissolve over time as educators see the benefits of doing things in a different way.
 - Technology in education is light years behind technology in other areas (entertainment, social networking, etc.) Technology has the potential to make school and learning more interesting and engaging. Really look to technology to make learning more meaningful and engaging...and also to help teachers gather information and feedback on their students’ learning. Problem is that education does not have the money that the business world has to develop software and programs. Also, special interest groups are advocates for ‘the box’ (i.e. textbook companies).
 - School boards are constrained by the laws and regulations imposed by the state—this poses a big challenge to educators and administrations interested in transformation. State Board and Legislature need to remove the regulations and rules that tie the hands of local school boards in moving toward transformation.
 - Vermont DOE does not offer a generalist certification but it is what allowed one educator/principal to truly learn how to facilitate learning for students. You cannot be licensed as a generalist (i.e. a facilitator of learning vs. a content area expert) in Vermont. This is something to consider as we redefine what we ask educators to do in the transformation process. Many students would not take ownership of document? How do we get students involved and get enthusiasm for transformation. Empowering students and letting them help design transformation might help. Also need to involve teachers who are not now involved in their schools.
 - Role of service learning is huge. Students get a sense of belonging to community. They feel they are needed. Service learning focus is extremely important.
 - Put all initiatives in the transformation effect. The transformation plan needs to be put in the context of all the other initiatives we have.
 - The Board has heard this concern and realizes it has to do something different for transformation to work.
 - We need to remember to “teach students, not subjects” and if that is done, individual learning plans will take place and work.
 - PD that is mandated disempowers teachers. Too many constrictions. Less flexibility takes away creativity for teachers. Too many mandates-federal, state, local su level.
 - We need to think outside of the box. We need to decide what we want education to look like in Vermont before we decide how we are going to do that. Boundaries need to be pushed out.
 - We cannot limit focus student success on certain things.

- Teachers feel like the relicensure procedure are overwhelming, but after they do it, they get a lot out of it. There needs to be consistency among local school boards.
- How do we build a child's sense of responsibility to their community: environmentally, teaching tolerance, dealing with conflict, learning from conflict?
- What does a school day/school calendar look like for a student in the Transformation? Maybe a statewide calendar is not what is best for each student...
- How do we get the best, most qualified teachers? Is the existing structure the best for getting the best? How can we change what needs to be changed?
- What happens to accelerated kids when they get to 10th grade?
- Is there a way to get input into the document from teacher preparation programs? (Yes)
- What about middle elementary students who are struggling with basic skills? What might a different path look like to change self-perception of kids?
- What are we doing for our seniors? (Those outcomes could drive the Transformation.) Look at European countries or Canada. (RC—Finland is an example)
- What kind of transitions between grades?
- Concern about school budgets, smaller schools struggling?
- Teachers have concern about social divide, pressure from NCLB, learning gaps – where will stressed teachers get support?
- Document is a huge paradigm shift – very hard to visualize – how will that happen?
- How will we help teachers (esp HS) move out of narrow thinking about their content into integration? Intimidating for teachers right now.
- Can kids define their own PLP? Will the youngest kids know the basic skills they need? (RC—a parent-teacher collaboration about needs of child)
- How can we get all parents involved in their child's education?
- How will we ensure that the Transformation will not be perceived as “just another thing”? How can we demonstrate the relevance and necessity of the proposed changes?
- What is it that changes teacher behavior in the classroom?
- How will we engage students? (RC will host meetings throughout the state.)
- Can we get the input of current college students? Of high school dropouts?
- How do we give teachers the skills to differentiate?
- Do all schools have high-speed internet?